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ABSTRACT

Studies are reviewed showing that the social status of a high school has a small independent effect on the college intentions of its students, over and above the effects of their family status and mental ability. This finding is analyzed with data from the Educational Testing Service's 1955 sample of 35,330 students in 518 American high schools. College intentions of students were found to be an effect of the social class composition of the school rather than of formal features of the school organization. The positive effects of school status on college intentions are found to mask a negative effect--in schools with students of high average ability, students of any given ability and status are less likely to have college intentions, presumably because internal standards of competition rise. When this hidden negative effect is held constant, the positive effect of school status on college intention increases. The conditions and mechanisms of the negative effect are considered. (Author/MF)

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FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
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Research and Development Memorandum No. 62

HIGH SCHOOL EFFECTS ON COLLEGE INTENTIONS

John W. Meyer

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Purpose: To show several contrasting effects of high school characteristics upon college intentions of students.

Method: Secondary contextual analysis.

Sample: 35,000 seniors in 518 U. S. high schools in 1955.

Conclusions: The small positive effects which schools of high socioeconomic status have on college intentions of given students are increased when the schools' average academic aptitude is held constant. This latter variable has a negative effect on college intentions because it is related to the competitive standards with which the individual student is compared.

Usefulness: Findings may be of use in long-range planning of systems of secondary education, although further research would be required.

Target groups: Sociologists of education; educational planners.

Table of Contents

	Page
Introductory Statement	iii
Abstract	iv
The Effects of Family Status, Individual Aptitude, and School Status	1
The Effects of High School Contexts: Organization or Peers	5
The Negative Effects of High School Contexts	8
Processes of the Negative Effects of Context	11
Structural Bases of the Negative Effects of Context	14
Summary	19
References	20

Introductory Statement

The central mission of the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching is to contribute to the improvement of teaching in American schools. Given the urgency of the times, technological developments, and advances in knowledge from the behavioral sciences about teaching and learning, the Center works on the assumption that a fundamental reformulation of the future role of the teacher will take place. The Center's mission is to specify as clearly, and on as empirical a basis as possible, the direction of that reformulation, to help shape it, to fashion and validate programs for training and retraining teachers in accordance with it, and to develop and test materials and procedures for use in these new training programs.

The Center is at work in three interrelated problem areas: (a) Heuristic Teaching, which aims at promoting self-motivated and sustained inquiry in students, emphasizes affective as well as cognitive processes, and places a high premium upon the uniqueness of each pupil, teacher, and learning situation; (b) The Environment for Teaching, which aims at making schools more flexible so that pupils, teachers, and learning materials can be brought together in ways that take account of their many differences; and (c) Teaching the Disadvantaged, which aims to determine whether more heuristically oriented teachers and more open kinds of schools can and should be developed to improve the education of those currently labeled as the poor and the disadvantaged.

The study of the effects of the high school environment on college intentions reported here in Research and Development Memorandum No. 62 is related to a larger project entitled The Social Context of Teacher-Student Relations. The project is concerned with the effects of the larger organization and societal contexts on teachers and students. It is one of the cluster contributing to the above-stated goals of The Environment for Teaching program.

Abstract

Studies are reviewed which show that the social status of a high school affects the college intentions of its students, over and above the effects of their family status and mental ability. This finding is analyzed with data from the Educational Testing Service's 1955 sample of 35,330 students in 518 American high schools. It is found to be an effect of the social status composition of the school rather than of formal features of the school organization. The positive effects of school status on college intentions are found to mask a negative effect: in schools with students of high average ability, students of any given ability and status are less likely to have college intentions, presumably because internal standards of competition rise. When this hidden negative effect is held constant, the positive effect of school status on college intention increases. The conditions and mechanisms of the negative effect are considered.

HIGH SCHOOL EFFECTS ON COLLEGE INTENTIONS

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This paper examines some of the complicated ways in which characteristics of the high school affect the student's passage through a crucial transition point--his decision to attend, or not attend, college. It first reviews the sociological discussion of the problem, including the essential finding of previous research on high school effects, namely, that the social status and/or community resources of the high school influence the student's decision to attend college independently of the effects of his own and his family's characteristics. The paper also shows empirically how the small overall effect of the status of the school conceals both a larger positive and a negative effect on the experience and intentions of any individual student. Schools of higher status are more likely to encourage a student to want and intend to go to college, but they are also more likely to give him doubts about whether or not he is really a good enough student to do so. The analysis of these contrasting effects is the aim of this paper.

The Effects of Family Status, Individual Aptitude, and School Status

Sociological discussions of the decision to attend college have distinguished two types of explanatory variables: (a) Those summarizing resources the individual has within the educational system--typically some measure of individual mental ability such as his IQ; and (b) those summarizing his resources in other social institutions--typically some measure of family social and economic status. These two broad variables are closely related. The established empirical finding, of course, is that socioeco-

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[1]The author wishes to acknowledge the helpful suggestions of William Bowers.

nomic status and mental ability both have large and independent effects on the decision to attend college (see, for example, Sewell, 1964; Sewell, Haller, & Straus, 1957).

Recently, a number of studies have added a new factor and a new level of analysis to the explanation of the decision to attend college. These studies have shown that the social status of the high school or its community has an effect on college intention or attendance in addition to the effects of mental ability and family status (Wilson, 1959; Michael 1961; Turner, 1964; Campbell & Alexander, 1965; Boyle, 1966a; Sewell & Armer, 1966).[2] Further, the effect of the school is over and above the slight effects high status schools may have by increasing the ability levels of their students (Michael, 1961; Coleman et al., 1966, Chapter 3).

The contextual effect of the school is smaller than the effects of individual ability and family status. Sewell and Armer (1966) and Sewell (1966) argue that the contextual effect--though they find it, too--is small and relatively uninteresting. (See also, Turner, 1966; Michael, 1966; Boyle, 1966b.) But the contextual effect is of considerable interest, because it suggests a new direction of research effort: to detail more explicitly and to explain the effects of the social organization of the school. Even though the effects of American public high school characteristics which have been discovered may not be of major consequence so far as prediction of college attendance goes (and this study will show that even this is more problematic than has been understood), they are of crucial interest in the analysis of educational organizations. American schools may not vary enough in significant ways to be the independent cause of great differences in college attendance, but to understand how school characteristics work, all available variations must be considered.

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[2]Wallin and Waldo (1966), however, found no such effect among eighth grade students.

The basic findings discussed so far are usually summarized using measures of partial association between family status, intelligence scores, and school status on the one hand, and college intentions and attendance on the other. The present study works with a sample of 35,330 high school seniors in a reasonably representative sample of 518 American public high schools studied by the Educational Testing Service in 1955 (for details on the sample and data, see Michaels, 1961, and Ramsøy, 1961, 1963). Information on the social background and college intentions of each senior was obtained from a short questionnaire. For this analysis,[3] any report by a student that he intended to do any college work--full or part time, day or evening--was counted as a college intention. This rather loose definition of a college intention resulted in classifying about 50% of the students as having college plans. The Educational Testing Service report shows that while there is a close association between college intention and actual attendance the following year, there are many deviant cases. The results of the present analysis of intentions also probably apply to actual attendance, but of course this is not certain.

Information on mental ability was obtained from a 20-item aptitude test constructed for the purpose. Information on the schools was obtained from a principals' questionnaire. In addition, measures of school characteristics could be constructed by combining information on the individual seniors.

Partial correlations are used here to summarize roughly the detailed multivariate cross-tabulations which were examined, but which would be extremely cumbersome to present. Wherever the effects of one variable seemed to differ systematically with the level of a second, it is explicitly noted.

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[3]Help with the data analysis by Patrick McDonnell, Stanford University, and the staff of the Russell B. Stearns Study, Northeastern University, is gratefully acknowledged.

Table 1 shows the partial correlations of family status, mental aptitude, and school status with college intentions of the students. In each case the other independent variables are held constant. Family social status is measured with an index, collapsed into quintiles, of occupational and educational (used to maximize the relation of the variable with college intentions) information about the family. School status was measured by simply taking the proportion of the seniors in each school who fell into the highest two quintiles on family status. Thus a higher status school is one in which more of the seniors come from high status families, while a lower status school is one with fewer seniors from such families.

Table 1

Partial Correlations of Family Status, School Status, and Mental Ability with the Intention to Attend College[a]

Family Status	School Status	Mental Ability	Total Cases
.19	.05	.23	(35,330)

[a]In each case, the other independent variables in the table are held constant.

Table 1 shows, with the 1955 data, the basic findings in the literature reviewed.[4] Thus, family status shows a correlation with college intention of .19, when ability and school status are held constant. Presumably, this figure shows the independent effect of family status on college intention. Certainly it excludes the effects of family status which occur through the higher mental ability test scores achieved by children from high status families. The partial correlation of .05 between school status and college intention presumably shows the direct effect of

[4]It can be noted in passing that the effect of family status is a little greater in high status schools than in low status schools.

school status, and is in any case independent of the effects higher status schools may have on college intentions by improving the mental abilities of their students. Also, this effect is contextual: Inasmuch as the correlation of .05 occurs with family status held constant, it shows that a student of any given family status and ability is a little more likely to attend college if he is in a high status school than if he is in a low status school.[5] Later, it will be shown that the small size of this effect is misleading.

The Effects of High School Contexts: Organization or Peers

Whatever the social-psychological processes through which high school contexts operate (over and above their effects through the mental ability of the students) two main structural paths are distinguished in the literature. (a) The high status school may affect the future intentions of its students through its formal structure--by having a network of college-oriented teachers, courses, curricula, and guidance counselors. (b) The high status school may surround each student with more college-oriented peers who informally influence him to see college as attractive, to be familiar with admission processes, and so on (Campbell & Alexander, 1965). Coleman et al. (1966) argue from a series of partial correlations that organizational features of the high school contribute much less to students' mental ability than its social class composition. (Bowles and Levin, 1968, take issue with this conclusion on a number of methodological grounds.) The peer effect is suggested by the fact that the most commonly used measure of the social class of a school is simply the aggregated social class of its students--in other words, the peers. This index is closely related to many organizational

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[5] As an indication of the statistical stability of the school status effect, when the cases are cross-tabulated according to family status quintile and ability quartile, 20 comparisons are created. In 17 of these the students in the highest school status quintile are more likely to intend to go to college than those in the lowest school status quartile.

resources of the high school, however, and so it is not at all clear which structures are operating when the measure is used.

What happens if the effect of both the social status composition of the school and its organizational quality are examined simultaneously? A crude measure of school quality can be constructed by combining several items of information about the organizational resources of the school into an index. Such information on the schools is available from a questionnaire which was administered to the 518 school principals. Other data on school organizations were obtained by aggregating the answers of the 35,330 seniors to questionnaire items.[6]

This yields two measures of high school characteristics to compare: school social status, which is the composition, in terms of family status, of the student body; and school quality, which refers to a measure of its organizational resources. Which of these variables, then, shows a greater effect on the college intentions of the students? In each case, it is desirable to look at the partial correlation of the variable with college intentions, with the other variable held constant. In both cases, of course, individual ability and family status must also be held constant.

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[6]In particular, the index of school quality was constructed by giving a school one point for each of the following items: (a) a principal's report of an average classroom size below 25 students; (b) formal accreditation of the high school; (c) a principal's report of one or more special staff members, such as psychologists, counselors, remedial teachers, librarians, or special art and music teachers; (d) the presence of more than one such staff member for each 50 students; (e) a principal's report of $1 or more per student spent on library materials and other nontextbook instructional supplies; and (f) if at least 56% of the seniors were familiar with two or more of seven national scholarship programs about which they were asked in the questionnaire. There are six items in the index, and a school's score could thus range from 0 to 6. Ramsøy (1963) discusses extensively the interrelationships of various kinds of school quality indicators.

Table 2

The Partial Correlations of School Social Status and School Quality with College Intentions

(a) Partial correlation of <u>school social status with</u> college intentions. School quality, individual ability and family status held constant.	(b) Partial correlation of <u>school organizational quality</u> with college intentions. School social status, individual ability and family status held constant.
.05	-.01

Table 2 shows that only school status seems to affect college intentions. The school status effect presumably captures more of the effects which occur through the peer relations of the student, and the school quality effect would capture more of those which occur through the formal structure. If this is true, the fact that only the effect of school status is found empirically suggests that only the informal structure of the school affects college intentions. Unfortunately, the measures are too crude for much confidence to be placed in the finding. The effect of school status may indeed be the informal effect of peers. But school social status may also affect standards of academic ability, interest, and performance, which in turn create an orientation toward college. The crucial, organizational resource of a high school might well be the social composition of its student body. With these data, however, this is not sure.

But the data <u>can</u> show the school effects are reduced when the respondent's reports of the college intentions of his friends are taken into account, which might suggest that peer influences are operating. However, these data are of ambiguous meaning. It often happens that college-bound students are put in classes and curricula with other college-going students, and thus that the college intention creates friendships with like-minded peers rather than vice versa.

The Negative Effects of High School Contexts

This discussion has assumed that the resources of high status schools operate to send their products higher and higher in the social order--like the resources of high status families. This perspective makes some sense, as the generally established findings on high school effects demonstrate.

But the high school differs from the family: it is only partly an ascribed base from which the child moves into a wider society in which he can achieve. Mostly, the high school is itself an arena for achievement. The individual high school is the socially defined market within which this competition takes place. The student is competing for the available rewards primarily with his peers in his own school, not directly with similar students in other schools.

This is an important point. There are many reasons why it is especially true in the United States. (a) There is a long tradition of local control which has inhibited the development of a legally established national market of high school graduates. (b) There is a large, diverse, and decentralized system of higher education without the internal organization or autonomy to create and enforce, through admissions standards, a national market. (c) The problems of motivating and controlling a mass student population lead to an emphasis on restricted, competitive, and local systems of evaluation and reward--primarily grades. (d) The quality of a school system is socially defined less by the quality or success of the products than by the quality of the educators and the role they are permitted to play. This means that a central measure of the worth of the system is the level of standards for success and failure it imposes on the students.

The most fundamental, continuous, and public definitions of the value of a high school student (i.e., grades and standing in the school) are formulated on a local base. Thus, in addition to all the supportive features of higher status schools discussed above, there is this negative

feature: The higher the academic worth of the other students in his school, the lower will be the academic worth of any given student; and consequently, the less likely he will desire, or feel encouraged, to go to college.

A rough measure of the competitive standards of a school is indicated by the mean score of its seniors on the 20-item aptitude test which is used to measure individual mental ability. This becomes, then, an attribute of the school. It would be preferable to have some index of average actual school performance, but such information is not available. The school's average ability score is, of course, closely related to its average student status, and to other indicators of school quality (for more information, see Ramsøy, 1961, 1963, and Michael, 1961). There is enough independent variation to enable examination of the separate effects of these variables on college intentions.

Table 3 shows what happens to the partial correlations of Table 1 when the average aptitude score of the school is included in the equation. The first line of the table repeats the information from Table 1 concerning the effects of individual ability, family status, and school social status on college intention. The second line shows the new information.

Table 3

Partial Correlations of Mental Ability, Family Status, School Social Status, and School Average Ability with College Intentions, Compared with the Same Data Excluding School Average Ability

	Mental Ability	Family Status	School Social Status	School Average Ability
Partial correlations without school average ability	.23	.19	.05	not included
Partial correlations including school average ability in the equation	.25	.19	.11	-.11

Table 3 shows two results of interest. First, the average aptitude of the students in the school does indeed have a negative effect on the college intention of students, holding constant the supportive features of such schools. That is, holding constant the student's family status and ability, and also holding constant the social status of the school, the school's average ability has a negative correlation, -.11, with college intention. (Similar effects on college students have been studied empirically by Davis, 1966, and Werts, 1968, and speculated about by Meyer, 1965.)

Second, the table shows that with the removal of the closely related negative effect of school average ability, the positive effect of school social status on college intentions is clearly increased. That is, the overall effect of school social status on college intentions is only +.05. But when the negative competitive effects of high status schools, which surround each student with more competent peers, are removed, by holding constant the average ability score of the school, the positive effect of school status jumps to +.11.

These partial correlations are central to the argument. Something about their statistical significance can be indicated by referring to the cross-tabulations. When family status quintile, ability quartile, and school status quintile are cross-tabulated, 100 groups of students are created. Within the 38 groups with cases in both extreme categories on school average ability, in 31 of these, the students in the lower school ability category are more likely to plan on college.

In the same tables, the school status effect can be studied, but comparisons of the highest and lowest quintiles can be made in only 14 of the 60 possible comparisons. In all 14, the students in the highest school status quintile are more likely to plan on college.

There are a number of reasons why the effects of school characteristics are generally found to be small. One reason is that the resources of the American high school, unlike those of the American family, are

ambiguous from the point of view of the individual student. Higher status schools support students more, but they also set higher competitive standards of performance. What is given with one hand is partly taken away by another.

Processes of the Negative Effects of Context

A number of different factors can be distinguished which might make a student less likely to attend college the more able his peers are. In this situation, each of the parties in the student's set of role-relationships might be a little less likely to think of him as "college material"--teachers, counselors, peers, parents, college admissions officers, and above all, the student himself.

In addition to listing the groups which define the student in comparison with others, some of the cues used can also be listed. Most important, probably, are (a) grades, which are greatly affected by the competence of his peers. But also important is (b) how hard a student has to work to get his grades or to improve them. If a student has to work very hard to do well, this lowered marginal utility of his effort may seem to himself and others an indicator of his worth as a student. (c) It also seems likely that the informal reactions to the student's work by teachers and peers would be less favorable, the more alternative high-quality performances there are to consider.

Some personal definitions of the student which result from these competitive processes and which presumably mediate between them and the college decision can also be indicated. (a) The esteem which the student or others attach to his self may be lowered if there are abler students around. (b) The lowered esteem may be attached to his role as a student only. (c) The student may be thought to be worthy both personally and intellectually, but to lack certain minor technical or motivational skills, such as a good memory, the ability to deceive the teacher on exams, an exam-oriented mentality, or the ability to study endlessly (Kessler, 1964). In all these cases, however, the student and others are disconnecting him

from such future academic activities as college attendance, whether or not his self-esteem is threatened.

There is no detailed evidence on teacher and peer conceptions of the student, but there is some information relevant to the student's conception of himself as a student. The 35,330 seniors in this study were asked in which quarter of the class their grade average placed them. Their answers showed considerable distortion--22% said they were in the top quarter, 39% in the second quarter, 34% in the third quarter, and only 5% said they were in the bottom quarter of their class. This shows that the students were able at least partially to adjust their answers to fit their self-conceptions, and their reports are used as indicative partly of actual grades, and partly of self-definition.

The students were also asked: "If you do <u>not</u> go to college, what will the reasons probably be?" They were given a list of 14 answers, including, "my teachers think I should not go" (checked by 1% of the students, "my high school grades are too low" (checked by 20%), and "I don't think I have the ability" (checked by 16%). A student who gave any one of these answers was considered as having expressed a lack of confidence in his academic worth or competence.

Table 4 shows how these two indicators of the definition of the student's academic worth are independently affected by family status, mental ability, school status, and school average ability. With the other variables held constant, then, is it true that the higher the average ability level of the school, the lower the self-definition of a given student?

Table 4

Partial Correlations of Family Status, Mental Ability, School Status, and School Average Ability with (a) Reporting Grades in Top Half of Class and (b) Not Giving Lack of Competence as Potential Reason for Not Attending College

	Family Status	Mental Ability	School Status	School Average Ability
(a) Reporting grades in top half of class	.04	.37	-.02	-.11
(b) Not giving lack of competence as potential reason for not attending college	.03	.23	.02	-.11

The table shows quite clearly the processes being considered. Individual mental ability, of course, greatly influences a student's description of his academic worth. Family status has little effect. (This is in contrast, interestingly enough, to the argument of Hollingshead, 1949.) School status has practically no independent effect--a powerful indication of the extent to which grades and other criteria of academic success are defined within a given school. On both indicators, the higher the ability level of his average peer, the poorer the grades any given student reports, and the less confidence he has in his own ability. This is shown by the two negative partial correlations in the last column.

When the indicators in TAble 4 are included in an equation with college intention as the dependent variable, they reduce, but do not eliminate, the negative effects of school average ability. Thus, presumably, the negative effect of school average ability occurs partly, but not completely, through the student's conception of his standing in class and general intellectual worth.

Structural Bases of the Negative Effects of Context

The negative effects[7] of high school average ability identified here are created by a simple structural situation. The frame of reference--or reference group--in which a high school student locates and compares himself (and is located and compared by those around him) is in good part defined by the boundaries of his school. This is the established ascriptive base within which his achievement takes place.

This system of comparisons could hypothetically be eliminated (though the wisdom of doing so would be very much open to question) in two ways, which turn out in the end to be similar. (a) The local school would not be a comparison base if all student performances throughout their school careers were compared with national standards. The student and others would then make decisions about whether or not he is "college material" without taking into account his standing in the local school. This would involve the development of more nationwide standardized testing. The most common tests now are the various college admissions and scholarship tests, which are usually given in the senior year, after college intentions (and local comparisons of students) have been defined.

Still, this nationwide testing now may already have had some effect. Such testing has increased greatly since 1955, when the data used here were gathered, and it would be interesting to see with more recent data whether the negative effects of contextual standards have decreased.

With the data available, however, a result can be shown which may indicate the development of a national market in high school students which would eliminate the negative comparisons found within the schools. If there is such a market, it should exist most strongly in schools of high social status. In these schools, students, parents, teachers, and

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[7]Several points raised here follow from Turner's (1960) distinction between systems of sponsored and contest mobility. These ideas are also related, of course, to the tradition of thinking about "relative deprivation."

administrators might be closely attuned to the college market. Everyone may be aware that most of the students receive high scores on college aptitude tests and are admitted to college. The flood of available information may make all the parties relatively aware of the student's situation in the wider market.

If individual students in high status schools do in fact locate themselves more realistically in a national college-going market, the negative effects of the average ability level of the school on the college intentions of any student should be greatly reduced. That is, the higher the status of the school, the lower should be the negative effect of average school ability. Table 5 shows the data relevant to this point. The students are divided roughly into quartiles from those in the lowest status schools to those in the highest status schools. Then a partial correlation is computed, separately within each group of students, between the average ability level of the school and the college intentions of the students. Family social status and individual mental ability are held constant.

Table 5

The Effects of School Average Ability on College Intentions, Shown Separately for Four School Status Levels with Individual Ability and Family Status Held Constant

	Low status schools (under 28% of the students from high status families)	Medium low status schools (28%-37% from high status families)	Medium high status schools (38%-47% from high status families)	High status schools (48% or more from high status families)
Partial correlation of school average ability and college intentions with individual ability and family status held constant	-.17	-.09	-.09	+.04
Number of cases	9,305	9,226	9,080	7,719

Table 5 shows that the negative effect of school average ability is eliminated, and even reversed, in the highest status schools.[8] This result could occur because of a number of different features such schools might have. It probably occurs because students in these schools become sensitized to their worth in the wider world of college admissions. If this is true, these findings may reflect a situation which in the future will become general.

A second way to eliminate the negative effects would be to retain the local school as the ascriptive base within which achievements are compared, but to attach differing evaluations to these schools. A student, for example, would be defined as a good student, but only in a Delta or Gamma school, or a problematic student, but in an Alpha school.

To some extent these evaluations of high schools take place now, but are not institutionalized. Students often attribute their academic difficulties to the competition they face, but this is not much consolation until all the relevant parties--parents, teachers, college admissions officers, peers in less competitive settings, and the others--publicly agree that it is so, agree to take it into account and symbolize this agreement. At this point, membership in this special collectivity becomes the kind of clear status under discussion. This is the case, for example, with private college-preparatory high schools.

Established rankings of high schools or parts of high schools may be increasing. A whole series of pressures in American education since Sputnik have led to increasing differentiation at the high school level. (a) There are a number of different curricula or "tracks" which are defined and ranked by the futures of their students. (b) The increased use of nationwide testing discussed above probably acts powerfully to locate high

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[8]The exceptionally high negative correlation in the lowest status schools is partly artifactual. It results from the inclusion in this group of about a thousand students from segregated southern Negro schools--schools which have very low average ability scores and rather high college attendance rates in segregated colleges.

schools with respect to their quality. (c) The increased concern parents have about the education of their children leads to more discussion and awareness in the community of the quality of its educational system in comparison with others. (d) The long-term increase in residential segregation by class and race produces more high schools which are internally homogeneous on these visible and ranked properties.

There are no data relevant to most of these ideas, but one can study the effect of a strong ascriptive evaluation of the school on its use by its students as an internal base for comparing their performances. The 1955 data contain a number of segregated southern white and Negro schools. These schools, in an odd way, fulfill this study's criteria. They are clearly and publicly ranked vis-à-vis each other, and they (and the groups within them) use each other to some extent as foci of comparison. In this situation, the argument goes, the students should be less likely to compare their performances with others inside the school. Thus the negative effects of the average ability of the school should be diminished. The situation is complicated, however, by the fact that almost all of these students will go to racially segregated colleges, and that because of the availability of such colleges, southern Negro students are much more likely to attend college than would be predicted from their background, ability, and high school circumstances (Ramsøy, 1963).

Table 6 shows the independent partial correlations with college intentions of family status, individual ability, school status, and school average ability, separately for southern white, southern Negro, and all other high schools. It is of especial interest whether the negative effects of school average ability are smaller in the southern white and Negro schools than in the remaining ones.

Table 6

Partial Correlations of Family Status, Mental Ability, School Status, and School Average Ability with College Intentions, Separately for Southern White, Southern Negro, and Northern Schools

	Family Status	Mental Ability	School Status	School Average Ability	Number of Cases
Southern White Schools	.21	.20	.08	-.01	(7,595)
Southern Negro Schools	.10	.10	-.07	-.03	(1,147)
All Other (Northern) Schools)	.19	.27	.10	-.06	(26,588)

The table shows that the negative effect of school average ability decreases sharply for southern white and Negro schools as compared to northern schools. In southern schools, students are apparently less likely to make internal comparisons of their performances. The data for southern Negro schools, however, are not very convincing. In these schools, the measures of individual ability and family status show unexpectedly small effects on college intentions. And school status shows a surprising negative effect. It is not clear whether these results have to do with weaknesses in the various measures used or rather result from substantive processes which are operating. In either case, however, the data make it difficult to take seriously the fact that school average ability level has a smaller negative effect than in northern schools.

Summary

The contribution of the present argument has been to further define and specify the finding, generally reported in the literature, that the social status composition of the high school shows a small independent effect on the college intentions of its students. This paper has shown that this effect does not seem to occur primarily through the high school's organizational quality. It rather results from the social class composition of the school. Whether the presence of many higher status students acts primarily by creating a college-oriented informal peer climate or by building a college orientation into the formal expectations and standards of the school is not clear.

This study has further shown that the small effect of the status of the school in college intentions masks two contrasting forces. There is, in reality, a larger supportive effect of school status than has been found, but there is also a negative effect. Higher status schools have more able students and because of the negative comparisons this produces for any given student, such schools tend to lower the aspirations. The extent to which this process operates depends on the degree to which all schools are roughly equivalent bases on which the student's academic worth is defined.

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